

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
#362**

ROBERT LEO PITZ

USS *ARIZONA*, SURVIVOR

**INTERVIEWED ON
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TRANSCRIBED BY:

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**USS *ARIZONA* MEMORIAL
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???: I wanted to record this because Bob had, was a navy pilot during World War II and among other things, had survived the *Arizona*. So Bob and I are sitting over here at the Holiday Inn over on 100 and off NOR-MAN-DALE. It's August the twenty-third, 1986, and we're just sitting here and having a cool one and relaxing. And I might mention, Bob, this particular bar has a lot of memories to you, doesn't it? We used to come in here quite a lot.

Robert Pitz (RP): Yeah, I certainly did. We had a regular group that came in here and the group is all broken up but...

???: When did you guys break up the group?

RP: I can't even remember that. It must be, it just suddenly disintegrated. I don't know why. There's no reason.

???: Yeah, I was going to ask you that before.

RP: Yeah, I don't know why they started drifting away. One fellow retired and he lives in Florida and another one got a job in Dallas. And some of the other guys are retired now. So they've all just wandered away.

?: Yeah. Well, that's interesting. You know, Bob, just touch base a little on your earlier aspect of your life. You went to, was it CREE-TON High School in...

RP: CREE-TON in St. Paul, right.

?: Graduated around nineteen...

RP: Nineteen thirty-four.

?: Nineteen thirty-four. Then did you go directly to Notre Dame?

RP: Right to Notre Dame. Graduated in '38.

?: What was your major?

RP: English.

?: You had a major in English. Okay, what got you interested in the service, Bob? Were you always interested in flying, or was that...?

RP: Oh yeah. Always. I've always been interested in flying. I don't know why I went in the navy. With a military school background, you would think I would go in the army, but I have no idea why I went in the navy, but I did.

?: Okay, well, when you got, when you left to college, did you go right into the service?

RP: No, I went to work for an advertising agency.

I graduated September, June and I

worked until the following April with an advertising agency in St. Paul.

?: Oh, I see. Okay. That's interesting. I didn't know that. Then you decided to go into the service?

RP: I was bored. I didn't know what the hell to do and I'd been thinking about it. I wanted to get into flying. I didn't know how to go about it. So I joined the navy with the idea that I'd go to naval flight training.

?: Mm-hmm.

RP: Which I eventually did. I was in the Great Lakes training for four months.

?: Excuse me, what year was this now, '39?

RP: Thirty-nine.

?: So you went in actually as an enlisted man?

RP: Right, right. And I went on the *Shawmut*, which is a transport which operated between Norfolk, Virginia and Shanghai. And it went, it stopped at every island. We'd go through the canal and stop at every installation, wherever there was a naval installation on an island, we'd stop.

?: Yeah?

RP: And we'd end up in Shanghai and finally go up north 400 miles to Tsingtao. That was our last stop, then we came back again. The same trip, hit the same islands.

?: But you weren't flying then?

RP: No.

?: Okay.

RP: I made one trip on the *Shawmut* and I started a second trip and my orders to flight school came through. I'd already had my physical and my mental tests _____.

?: Okay.

RP: So they dumped me off in Samoa and I had to wait there for three weeks to get another ship which was coming back, which was the *Henderson*, the USS *Henderson*, another transport. And they brought me back to Norfolk and from there I went down to Pensacola where I got in my flight school training.

?: Okay. Now, what rank or what rate were you when you went to flight school? Normally, weren't most of these students just getting into the service?

RP: No. Well, you mean the cadets?

?: Cadets.

RP: There were cadets but mostly they were, at that time, in 1939, all regular navy. There were people out of the fleet, enlisted people and commissioned people, both in the same classes.

?: That's interesting. You were an enlisted man.

RP: Yeah. The reason we had, have I told you why we had non-commissioned pilots or enlisted men?

?: No, I don't think so.

RP: Well, we had a treaty with Japan whereas we were allowed only so many naval aviators. So they called, didn't call us aviators, enlisted people were called aviation pilots.

Commissioned people were aviators. It was a matter of semantics, they're keeping within the treaty but still getting all the pilots they wanted.

?: Oh, I didn't know that. That's interesting.

RP: Well, that was the only reason we had enlisted pilots.

?: Okay, so we're now looking at, what, the end of '39, the early part of 1940?

RP: Early '40 now, yeah.

?: Okay, now how long was it, how long did the _____ take to complete?

RP: It was supposed to take a year and they started rushing us through for some reason and I was there eleven months.

??: Okay, the war had broken out.

RP: No, no. The war hadn't broken out.

??: So from start to finish, it was only eleven months?

RP: Eleven months.

??: _____ wings?

RP: Yeah.

??: Oh, really?

RP: Yeah.

??: I think now it's like three years or something.

RP: No, I don't think so. I have no idea but I don't think so. It used to be a year. There's a lot of classroom involved in this.

?: Yeah.

RP: Less flying.

?: So eleven months. I didn't know. I thought it was longer than that. Okay, so what was your first assignment after you graduated and got your wings? And incidentally, you still were an enlisted man now?

RP: Yeah. I'm still enlisted. My first ship was the *USS Arizona*.

?: Oh, I see. Right out of school.

RP: Yeah, that was my first man-o-war. And they had three pilots on each battleship, three aircraft.

?: Okay, and again, Bob, the type of aircraft again.

RP: OS-3.

?: Okay. Because I call 'em the Kingfisher.

RP: Kingfisher, yeah.

?: Okay, that was the type of aircraft that was catapulted off
the...

RP: Right, that's right. Off the Number Three turret.

?: Okay. And there was three aircraft.

RP: Three aircraft.

?: Okay.

(Taping stops, then resumes)

?: Okay, Bob, what I was going to ask you, when you were assigned to the *Arizona*, where did you pick up the ship?

RP: In San Pedro, California.

?: Oh, is that right. Okay. Was that the port for the *Arizona* at that time?

RP: That was the homeport, yeah.

?: Okay. But you mentioned that you wanted a carrier but apparently your wishes were not...

RP: Well, I had to go where I was sent.

???: That's right. Okay. So then did you live offshore there in San Pedro for a while?

RP: Yeah, while we were there. We were there about, oh, three or four weeks and then we went up to the islands, out to Hawaii.

???: _____ guys maintain an apartment there in Long Beach or San Pedro?

RP: No.

???: Okay.

RP: Well, a lot of the married guys lived in Long Beach.

???: Okay.

RP: 'Cause that was our homeport.

?: Well, that's interesting. Okay, so you departed and went to Pearl Harbor?

RP: Yeah.

?: And you arrived there approximately when?

RP: Well, we operated out of there from then on. We very rarely came back to the States any more. In fact, I can only remember once, I might be wrong. But the only time I remember coming back was when our evaporators had gone out. Oh no, we escorted the *Liverpool*, a British cruiser, who was badly hit in Africa, whatever the name of that place in Africa was. She was very badly hit and they brought it, she got back to the Hawaiian Islands and then we escorted her with a cruiser and a couple of destroyers up to Bremerton, where she was going to be repaired.

?: Again, what time, what are we talking about, during the fall?

RP: This is in early, this must have been in either early, I think it was early '41.

?: Okay. All right.

RP: Or late '40. It must have been early '41.

?: Okay, it's about during this time you were maintaining practice flights every day?

RP: Oh yeah. Yeah. We were out. Well, not every day. We'd be, we would be out operating with, there was always three battleships in port and six battleships out. Initially there were nine battleships out and three in and then Battle Division Three went to the East Coast. And I don't remember the names of those battleships any more. But then we only had nine battleships operating out of Pearl.

?: Hmm.

RP: But even when we were in, we would fly daily. We never, we didn't take our planes off the floats and we had a ramp and dollies so we could get up on shore. Fellows in what they called the boots, they were wearing diver's suits. They would jockey us into these dollies and then they'd pull us to shore...

?: Hmm.

RP: ...with a tractor, up the ramp.

?: Okay. So then during this period of '41, prior to the attack, it was mainly just routine...

RP: Routine flying, gunnery practice, spotting for the big guns. That was about it.

?: Did you have an apartment in Hawaii or...

RP: No.

?: ...you always...

RP: Always lived on the ship.

?: Okay. But you had liberty quite often, did you?

RP: Oh yeah. Yeah, when we got in, sure.

?: Oh...

RP: But then we might be out for three weeks.

?: When did you get commissioned? And when did you jump from an enlisted man to a commissioned...

RP: I was offered a commission after war started and I really didn't want a commission. By this time, I was a chief. I was a chief AP, chief aviation pilot and I didn't want a commission. I was happy the way I was. I didn't want any additional responsibility. I had all the flying I wanted. And then I was married. I got married to that actress and she wanted me to have a commission, so I told 'em I'd take it. At first they offered me ensign and I said, "No way. I want two stripes. I want full lieutenant."

?: Hmm.

RP: And so we were hemming and hawing about that then finally they offered me lieutenant JG, so I took JG.

?: You mentioned you were married, about when and where did that marriage occur?

RP: Happened in the end of '42.

?: Okay, this is after war had broken out.

RP: Yeah. Or early '43, I think it was. Because they pulled me out of the fleet to go on a war bond tour and that's where I met her.

?: Oh, I see.

RP: And I was supposed to be on that tour for six months and I hated it so damned much that I kept trying to get out. Well, I knew her for ten days and we got married. And finally I did, my request to get out did go through and I went back to the fleet.

?: Well, that's interesting. Well...

(Taping stops, then resumes)

?: Bob, I would like to dwell now on what were you doing the day before the Pearl Harbor attack? Was it just, that would've been a Saturday, was it just a...

RP: Yeah. I was ashore and I was with my Japanese girlfriend, Dorothy, and I came back about eight o'clock at night. And we had, I made a date with Dorothy for breakfast the next morning. I was going to get the eight o'clock liberty boat and I'd be in Honolulu about nine, eight-thirty or nine o'clock so I was going to meet her for breakfast. And of course, I never got that boat because at ten minutes to eight, they hit us. And...

?: Well, you were up and was getting...

RP: Oh yeah, I was shining my shoes. I had, I didn't have a tunic on, but I had my trousers and skivvy shirt and I was shining my shoes when they hit us.

?: Mm-hmm. No warning at all, whatsoever.

RP: No warning. Somebody ran down. Actually our quarters were on the main deck so he ran in and he said, "The Japs are out there."

We heard the planes and we thought they were army planes, 'cause the army did that occasionally to us. So I didn't believe him, none of us did. And I went out on deck to look and then I see these machine guns start splintering up the teak wood in front of me and I knew something was cooking. By then, they sounded general quarters, but not until then.

?: You mentioned your quarters were above deck. Was this the mid-ship or...

RP: No, we were aft of the mid-ship. We were, there were only about, as near as I can recall, twenty-two or twenty-three

people in the aviation unit, exclusive of the pilots, which are three more. But the other two pilots were ashore. They were both commissioned.

?: The *Arizona* was the flagship at that time?

RP: Yeah. It was the flagship, how do I put it? It was flagship of Battle Division One, but it was not the fleet flagship.

?: Okay.

RP: Fleet flag was the *Pennsylvania*, which was in Battle Division One.

?: Okay, you had, among the loss of life, there was the admiral, was it Admiral Kidd?

RP: Admiral Kidd, Captain [Franklin] VanValkenburgh, they both got ashore in time to get up on the bridge and a bomb hit there, or maybe it was whatever flew off that...

?: Excuse me Bob, you said they both got aboard, I mean...

RP: They were ashore.

?: Oh, they were ashore...

RP: Yeah.

?: ...when the attack broke out?

RP: Yup.

?: Oh, so they—I'll be darned. So they came back.

RP: They came back, the executive officer came back. There, a lot of people were ashore, the commissioned ranks. Liberty ended for, at midnight, for, in Honolulu, for first class and below. Chiefs could stay overnight.

?: Mm-hmm.

RP: And officers could stay overnight.

?: Hmm.

RP: But they both came aboard in time to get knocked off. The exec survived. I can't remember his name.

?: Okay. Then what there, what happened shortly after? Did you leave the ship then...

RP: No, no. I ran back, I saved my life. That's training to the navy. I ran back to my battle station, which was my aircraft.

?: But you aircraft wasn't there.

RP: My aircraft wasn't there, but I didn't even think about that.

Nor did I think that even if it were there, we couldn't launch, dead in the water. And our planes had been put ashore.

?: There wasn't any, there was no planes on the...

RP: No planes on any of the battleships, they were all...

?: _____ Ford Island was it?

RP: Ford Island.

?: Okay.

RP: That's where we were tied up, at Ford Island.

?: All right.

RP: So I ran back aft and I didn't know what the hell to do. I was slipping in blood and there were bodies and I got hit in the back of the head with shrapnel. And I was lost on my own ship. There was so much smoke. And I got between Number Three and Four turrets and a gunner's mate or a boatswain mate—I don't remember which now—came by, a guy I knew, and he said, "Pitz, let's get the hell out of here!"

And I said I was willing but I didn't know where to go!

?: Yeah.

RP: So I just followed him and we got off, we got up mid-ships by the quay, where we were tied up.

?: What's a quay, Bob?

RP: It's a mooring...

?: _____

RP: We had two of 'em and the captain's gig and the admiral's barge were there and also were some liberty boats. They were on the other side. So we finally got in the admiral's gig. We didn't have far to go but the water was all burning, all the oil on the water was burning. Otherwise it'd have been not very far to shore.

So we got ashore in the admiral's barge. The first sergeant of marines was standing on the quay and he was holding his belly and his intestines were streaming out through his fingers. He must have got a big shrapnel hit.

?: Yeah. Well, when you boarded that liberty boat, was it each man for himself or, I mean, were there...

RP: No, there were very few people there actually. And that's why I thought nobody survived because, except that group that was on that quay. And I guess some of 'em got out after or maybe before. I don't know. I don't recall if there was any abandon ship order, but I think everything was shot out because there was no communication _____.

?: Sure. Okay, so then approximately how many were on that liberty boat?

RP: Oh, it wasn't a liberty boat, it was the admiral's...

?: Oh, the admiral's...

RP: ...admiral's barge and there were...

?: Now, was this the flag, the flag admiral or the...

RP: No, no, no. It was the flag of the first battle division. It was Admiral Kidd's barge.

?: So it was his barge. Okay.

RP: Oh, the captain's gig was there too and some of the guys went into that.

?: Uh-huh.

RP: And we just took off through the burning water and like I said, we didn't have far to go. But I had no clothes on at this point. I was totally, everything was blown off.

?: No kidding!

RP: Everything! I had the tops of my socks. I had a thing around my skivvy and the neck part of my skivvy shirt. And

the top of my drawers, where the buttons are. The rest was rags hanging down. They'd just been blown off of me.

?: Wow, that is something!

RP: Well, I knew I got knocked down several times, but I wasn't, I thought I had fallen but apparently it was the blast, bomb blast that knocked me down.

?: Hmm. So when you hit the shore, hit the beach, what did you do then?

RP: Well, my first instinct was to try to get a hold of a machine gun someplace and then somebody told me I was bleeding. So I didn't feel anything at this point. I didn't feel any pain or anything. But I was bleeding pretty bad from—head bleeds bad anyhow, you know. Maybe it was in my back anyhow, my back and my head and was running down my back. And I tried to get a machine gun and somebody

grabbed me and they had set up a sickbay in the mess hall on the shore installation. And somebody run me up there and by this time there was a woman nurse from Honolulu, a doctor, not a nurse, a doctor. A lot of doctors came over, the civilian doctors, to help. And she took the shrapnel out and sewed me up. And I still don't have any clothes on!

So we're still under attack, see. This thing lasted for two hours.

?: Two hours.

RP: Yeah.

?: Yeah.

RP: So we finally got a machine gun. I got a couple of sailors and we got a machine gun. And we went up on the roof of a building, about a two-story building. And there were no

tracers. You couldn't see where you were shooting. It was just a thirty-caliber machine gun. And we ran through one belt and that's all we had, was one long belt of ammunition. We ran through that but I don't know if we hit anything 'cause you couldn't, there were no tracers, it was all service. So we didn't know if we hit anything or not.

?: And you still didn't have any clothes on?

RP: No, I still had no clothes on. So anyhow, finally the attacked stopped and three photograph planes came over in perfect formation and everybody who had anything to shoot shot and they didn't break formation. They were low and nobody apparently hit 'em, at least not badly. And I know they were just taking pictures. And they finally left too. And that was the last we saw of the Japanese.

?: Just briefly, Bob, do you know what the loss of life was on the *Arizona*?

RP: Yeah, we had 1500 men aboard and they said that there were 165 of us that got off.

?: Got off. That's why I find it so, of interest to record because, you know, that's forty years ago and you just wonder how many survivors are still alive.

RP: Well, I tried to find out one time. I wrote the BuPers, Bureau of Personnel at the navy, and they said there was no way of trying to track the people down. They didn't know how many died of wounds at the time of the attack. They didn't know how many were killed in subsequent action and there was no way for 'em to find out. So I have no idea how many are left. I would like to know.

?: That would be interesting. I don't know. You're right, I don't know how you would find out. (Inaudible) Oh, I'm sure there are.

RP: There must be a way but at that time, of course everything now is computerized but at that time it wasn't.

?: Yeah.

RP: And I suppose it would be impossible to try to track down the survivors.

?: Yeah. Well, you could maybe put an ad in one of the service magazines, *American Legion*, *VFW*, maybe. Well, okay then, Bob. That was your first day and what transpired then? What were the events after this? Just a second.

(Taping stops, then resumes)

?: Bob, we're just talking a second ago about, you were talking about how happy a ship the *Arizona*, what were you saying? It was commissioned in 1915?

RP: Nineteen fifteen, same year I was born, by the way.

?: Oh!

RP: We had a chief water tender in one of the boiler rooms and he'd been on the *Arizona*, he went aboard when it was commissioned in 1915 as an apprentice seaman. He spent his entire naval career on the *Arizona* in that same boiler room.

?: Well, I'll be darned!

RP: And he got killed in that boiler room.

?: In the attack?

RP: During the attack. He spent his whole damn career in one boiler room.

??: I'll be damned!

RP: Nineteen fifteen to 1941, I don't know how many years that is, twenty-six years?

??: Yeah. That's very unusual for...

RP: It is!

??: ...service.

RP: Not to be transferred off.

??: You, I guess we're getting off the subject, but you've never seen the memorial that's in Pearl Harbor today?

RP: No. My family have seen it a couple of times. They've been aboard it.

?: How would you feel, Bob? Would you...

RP: I don't think I'd want to see it.

?: Yeah? I can understand.

RP: I've got pictures of friends of mine who've been out there
and also my family...

?: Sure.

RP: ...given me pictures or taken pictures for me...

?: Yeah.

RP: ...but I don't even like to look at it.

?: Oh, I can understand. You had a lot of friends, I'm sure, Bob...

RP: Oh yeah. Well, supposedly 1100 aboard yet. So it's a monument to them but I don't want to see it.

?: No. Well then, the days following the attack, did you stay on shore there in Pearl Harbor?

RP: Oh yeah. We organized another squadron, all _____ . We had a lot of 'em crated. All our planes were there. My plane was not shot up too badly and it was repaired. But the other two aircraft from the *Arizona* were totally destroyed. And I think practically all the battleship planes were pretty bad. Some of 'em maybe were repaired, I don't remember. But we got all new planes. And we organized, or they organized, I should say, a scouting squadron. Well, we flew three patrols a day and then the army took over. We'd fly from five, for four-hour flights,

each of us with a separate sector and we'd have four planes out at a time.

?: Operating off the base?

RP: Out of Ford Island. We'd put our planes on wheels this time.

?: Right.

RP: And we flew off of a strip at Ford Island.

?: So then you'd come back and then the army pilots would take the same airplane out?

RP: No. Our own squadron relieved us, each of our four planes that were out. They would relieve each sector and our last flight was the five to nine, nine to one? Anyhow, the four-hour flights after our last flight, which would be sometime in

the afternoon, about six o'clock, then the army took over flying those sectors.

?: Again, are they flying their own planes or your planes?

RP: No, no. Their planes. Their planes.

?: Okay. All right. How far would you go on those flights?

RP: Oh, we'd go out about 250 miles.

?: Okay. Strictly looking for enemy activity out there?

RP: Yeah, submarines...

?: Subs or any ships?

RP: ...or any ships.

?: Well, when you started getting back to flying and from the attack 'til you started to fly, how long a period are we talking about? Did you have a kind of a void there, you didn't do much?

RP: Not very long void. About four days.

?: Oh, really! Okay.

RP: Well, we were worried, you know, the day after the attack, we couldn't get, well, there was no food for about a week and no water. The water main had been broken from the mainland, the main part of Oahu to Ford Island.

?: So what happened?

RP: We used to get a sandwich at ten o'clock in the morning and one at five o'clock at night when we'd go to the mess hall.

??: That's it, huh?

RP: That was it. And but then I went to all the knockout planes and I got the emergency rations and I had a storehouse of those, so I didn't go hungry. And then I'd go across the strip to where the marines were. They didn't know if I'm marine or not, you know.

??: Yeah.

RP: So I'd eat there too and then I'd go at five o'clock, go up and get my other sandwich! (Chuckles) So I didn't go hungry.

??: What'd you do for water?

RP: Oh, they finally, they'd bring over a tug with water and then they rigged up a line for us, that they laid along the bottom of Pearl...

??: Uh-huh.

RP: ...so we could get water.

(Conversation off-mike)

(Taping stops, then resumes)

??: Okay, Bob, so you slowly got yourself re-established...

RP: Oh yeah and by Thanksgiving, not Thanksgiving, by Christmas, we had turkeys, we had regular typical old-time navy feast. So they shipped over everything for us. We weren't without food very long.

??: Sure. How long did it take to, you know, more or less get that operation back, functioning again, the whole...

RP: Oh, I left before that. I went on the *Enterprise* long before they were through. I don't know what they did with the *Oklahoma*. I think they scrapped her. She rolled over, you know.

?: Yeah.

RP: In seven minutes. And...

?: That was a battleship too?

RP: Yeah. And the *Nevada* was all right. She was badly hurt, but taken care of okay and was in actually was shelling in the invasion of Europe. So all the old battlewagons were repaired with a few exceptions, the *Arizona* and the *Oklahoma*, and they saw further action. We never lost another battleship in that whole war, you know.

?: Oh, that's interesting! Oh, I didn't know that. I'll be darned, that interesting!

RP: Yeah.

?: Okay. Okay, so, all right, then they came along and said, "Bob, we're going to put you on a carrier," which you had wanted anyway.

RP: Oh yeah. I sure as hell did. I, well, they had, I was a, there were only two of us picked out of that squadron, that patrol squadron over there. And the rest of the other three—no there was six of us—the other four were brand new pilots from the States. And we got six brand new SPDs and we met the *Enterprise* at sea. We flew 'em out to sea.

?: Okay, when, what was it now? What year was this

_____?

RP: Yeah, it was in '42.

?: Early part of '42.

RP: Yeah.

?: Okay.

RP: I flew, I went out. That was in March of '42. March or February, I can't, I don't remember which.

?: Did you have to qualify to fly that SPD? That's a _____, is that what they call a _____?
That was a torpedo bomber?

RP: No, no, no. Just a dive-bomber. Not a torpedo bomber.

?: Okay, dive-bomber. Did you have to get some—how'd you qualify to...

RP: I took it out _____!

?: You didn't, there wasn't any of this...

RP: No!

?: Three hours with an instructor, right?

RP: Oh, hell no. No.

?: They said, there it is.

RP: Yeah, there it is, go ahead and take it.

?: Was that an easy transition for you?

RP: Oh, it wasn't bad. No, it wasn't bad at all. I had a lot of confidence in those days, Tom.

?: That's two flights, right. You had a...

RP: Yeah.

?: ...what do you call it again?

RP: Pilot and a gunner.

?: Okay, is a navigator or just...

RP: No, no, just...

?: Just a gunner, okay.

RP: I did my own navigating.

?: Did you bring a gunner out there when you flew out?

RP: No. No, we didn't. None of us did that. They had plenty of qualified gunners on the *Enterprise*.

?: Well, when you made that first landing, how was that landing?

RP: Pretty bad.

?: 'Cause you hadn't been doing that, had you?

RP: No!

?: How bad was it?

RP: Well, bad enough for me to get six wave-offs.

?: Is that right? (Chuckles)

RP: And I got really laid into by the air officer.

?: Well, it's not your fault.

RP: He said he thought they were going to have to shoot me down and they would've if I hadn't have made it. If I'd have made one more pass, he said, "We needed that plane too badly."

?: How'd the other guys do? Were they...

RP: Oh, they got some wave-offs too, except one guy, he went in on his first...

END OF TAPE ONE

TAPE TWO

?: ...did you know anybody on the *Enterprise*?

RP: Oh yeah, yeah. I knew some guys.

?: Okay.

RP: The navy wasn't so big then that you didn't, no matter where I'd go, I'd know somebody.

?: When was the *Enterprise* commissioned?

RP: Oh...

?: Approximately.

RP: I don't remember. I just don't remember when it was commissioned.

?: Do you recall what the full complement was on those particular...

RP: I believe the *Enterprise* had about 4000, near as I can recall, about 4000.

?: But it was operating. It was not built during the war years.
It was...

RP: Oh no, uh-uh. It and the *Yorktown* were about the same time, I think, they were commissioned.

?: Okay.

RP: But I don't remember when it was. *Saratoga* and the *Lexington*, they were commissioned earlier. They were number two and three carriers. The *Langley* was number one and then there was the *Lex* and the *Sara*.

?: Oh yeah?

RP: Yeah, we were number six.

?: Sixth carrier built? What, now we're talking about those carriers, the *Yorktown* went down, didn't it?

RP: The *Yorktown* went down, yeah.

?: The *Enterprise*...

RP: The *Enterprise* never, we got hit a few times but we never went down.

?: And it probably ended up in the scrap pile after the war?

RP: Yeah.

?: They scrapped her?

RP: It's too bad too. She had more battle stars than any other ship in the navy.

?: That was the flagship, was it?

RP: No. For a while it was. Bull Halsey had his flag on there but then he transferred it to the *North Carolina*.

?: Okay.

RP: Or the *Iowa*. I don't know, one of those battleships. I think it was *North Carolina*.

?: So how long did you stay on the Big E?

RP: Almost the entire career from then on and I went for a while to the *Essex*.

?: What happened to the *Essex*? Did that...

RP: No, that never got sunk. That was number twelve. I was in Bombing Twelve on that one. And the only reason I was there, I think I was requested to air officer—no, he was a skipper of Bombing Twelve and he had been my senior aviator on the *Arizona*. And I think he requested me. I didn't much like the *Essex*. I don't know why.

?: Was it as big as the E?

RP: Oh yeah.

?: What, same size?

RP: Might even been bigger. I don't. But then he was made, he was promoted and made air officer and I didn't like the new skipper and I wanted to go back to the *Enterprise*. So I requested to return to the *Enterprise* and they finally granted it.

?: So was that the ship that you _____ after the war? Were you on that ship when the war ended?

RP: The *Enterprise*?

?: Yeah.

RP: No, I was back in the States when the war ended. I was back, we were forming a new air group.

?: When did you go back to the States, approximately?

RP: For the new air group?

?: Yeah.

RP: Golly, I can't remember.

?: Toward the end of the war.

RP: It was toward the end of the war, yeah, but we were leaving, we were in Seattle and the plane, the new carrier—I don't even know the name of it—was in San Francisco and we were to leave at six o'clock this one morning. Well, that night we got word that the war was over, that Japan had quit.

?: VJ Day?

RP: Yeah. And I was, my wife was up and we had a little cottage over in Kirkland, or across Lake Washington anyway, and it got late. Normally there was a ferry between the air base and this town. I think it was Kirkland, I'm not sure. But after certain hours, that ferry didn't run. So in order to get back to the base, I had to go to Seattle and take a bus back. So on the ferry I heard that the war was over and I didn't

believe it 'til I got to Seattle, then I believed it. There was no way I could get to air base, the town was nuts!

?: Oh, I suppose, yeah.

RP: So I called, I called the field and told 'em the predicament I was in. They said just forget it. I talked to the base commander, he said, "Just forget about it." He said, they hadn't got orders yet, but he said, "I'm sure this whole thing is going to be cancelled," and which it was.

And of course I was regular navy and I had to stay no matter what, but all the reserves wanted to get out. And I was sent to another air group in California, someplace, near Port WY-NEE-MEE. It was a makeshift crew and it was a terrible situation and I was the exec for that air group, but I wasn't, that's normally a commander's job. I was still a lieutenant commander.

?: Mm-hmm.

RP: But they didn't have anybody and they had a guy that, the skipper of the air group was a, he had flown a desk in Washington the whole damn war and he didn't know how to handle men, he didn't know how to handle an air group and he left everything up to me. Well, I had a thirty-day leave coming, so I put in for thirty days leave and he denied it. So I requested permission to go over his head. It's a survivor's leave that I had never gotten, see, and he can't refuse that.

?: Survivor's leave?

RP: Yeah.

?: I never heard that expression before, surviving leave of the war?

RP: No, surviving a ship sinking. I'd never gotten a thirty-day leave for being sunk on the *Arizona*.

?: Oh, is that _____.

RP: You go down on a ship or your ship goes down, you get thirty days leave automatically. And I had never gotten my thirty-day leave. I've had leaves, but never a survivor's leave. So I got my survivor's leave and I don't even remember where I went after that! But I only had, I got out in '46 and that was August of '45, so I had very little time left to do.

?: What was your rank when you were discharged?

RP: Lieutenant commander.

?: Okay, you stayed there. Where were you when you were discharged? What base were you at?

RP: I was in Seattle.

?: Okay. That was your last base then.

RP: My last base.

?: Let's, Bob, go back a little bit, if we may, to when you were flying off the Big E. Now you mentioned that you were flying an SPD, one question, what other types of aircraft were on that carrier? Do you recall?

RP: Yeah, F-6, F-6Fs, there were the fighter planes. TB, that's the Grummond fighter. A TBF, which is a torpedo plane and also a Grummond. And the SB-2C, which was a _____.

?: Okay.

RP: By that time, the SPD has been superceded by the SB-2C.

?: Okay. How many pilots were on board those carriers? Take a guess.

RP: Well, we could put eighty planes in the air, so there's eighty pilots, but then we had, we must have had forty, at least forty backup pilots.

?: You could carry eighty planes on those carriers?

RP: Yeah.

?: Now, you were, just the dive bomber was primarily the aircraft that you flew during the...

RP: The only plane I ever flew operationally, outside of

_____.

??: Okay. You want to discuss maybe some of your little escapades that you, you told me one time you thought you had certainly sunk your ship there or _____ ship?

RP: Oh yeah. A couple of times I did. But I got a good hit on the *MO-GA-MEE*, which was a cruiser. I got hit some carriers, but you don't know how effective they are. I mean, by the time you're able to look, dive bombers following you have already hit 'em too, so you don't know where the hell your bomb was except you know when you hit one because you're right on target. But even a near miss can do a lot of damage and then it springs their plates.

??: _____ water?

RP: Yeah.

??: _____ that much concussion that
_____?

RP: Yeah.

?: Now, you've taken pictures too when you...

RP: That's only when your guns go.

?: Okay, were you using guns as well?

RP: Yeah, when I strafed. Then your camera automatically goes on and there's a watch in there that times, it's on the film, the time that the guns are being fired.

?: Oh, how many bombs would you carry?

RP: Depended upon what, we could carry 2000 pounds of bombs on the SB-2C.

?: Okay, this is a dumb question but when you say 2000 pound bomb, was that the actual weight of the bomb?

RP: No, we never carried 2000-pounder, but we would carry 2000 pounds of bombs. We'd carry a thousand-pounder, maybe two 500, or it all depends upon what you're bombing. If we're hitting a shore installation, we'd probably go for fragmentation bombs and maybe it'd be 250-pounders. But you don't have to drop 'em all at once.

?: Did you do a lot of bombing on shore?

RP: Oh, that was more of our job than anything else, is to support the marines.

?: What areas were you coming out _____? Do
_____?

RP: Yeah, I'll, oh god, I can't remember all the islands. There were so many of 'em. Guam, Iwo...

?: Iwo Jima?

RP: Yeah.

?: Were you sort of that softening or coming into, before the...

RP: Well, at first they hit 'em with the big guns first.

?: Yeah.

RP: And then we came in after that.

?: Oh, you _____. That's interesting. You were on that _____, before the...

RP: What were some of the other islands? It's so many years, I can't even think of 'em now.

?: What were you bombing on _____? I understand the enemy was so entrenched that it's hard to find...

RP: Well, no, you didn't, we knew approximately where the guns were. We knew where those emplacements were and we'd hit, we had maps, you know, and we'd hit where we thought there was a gun emplacement. And if you hit enough, drop enough you were bound to hit one, so _____. But you know, they were deeply entrenched, no question about it.

?: Well, you told me one time that you had a close call. Your aircraft was shot down?

RP: Yeah.

?: Okay, tell me about that.

RP: Well, that was in the Philippines. We were coming back. In fact, we were on our way back to the carrier. We'd been supporting—this was a ground support deal too.

?: Come back to the *Essex*?

RP: No, I was on the *Enterprise* then.

?: Oh, you got...

RP: Back on the *Enterprise* then and we were coming back and two Zeroes hit me and one of 'em peeled away but the other one stayed on me and he just shot the hell out of me. But we, my gunner and myself, _____ got a personal hit but he shot the airplane all to hell. And I was smoking very badly. I didn't see any flames, but I know I had to open my canopy because my cockpit was getting filled with smoke. And I had to go down, I was losing power, I had no hydraulics left. And

I didn't see him anymore, this Zero, until we hit the water.
We landed, I landed wheels up in the water.

?: Oh really, you stayed with the plane?

RP: Yeah.

?: May I ask why you did that versus...

RP: Well, by this time we were too damn low to bail out anyhow.

?: Oh, okay.

RP: 'Cause he'd followed us down. And I thought I'd get rid of him by diving, but I couldn't. And so we landed in the water and I looked up and I saw the Zero going down—well, he blew up in the water. Fighter, one of our pea-shooters got him.

?: Mm-hmm.

RP: So he was up there only maybe three minutes after he knocked us down. And then the fighter came in over us and waggled his wings, kind of a victory waggle, I guess. But a destroyer saw us coming in with smoke and then they put a boat out and picked us up. We weren't in the water ten minutes.

?: You didn't have to radio them? Okay. But then you were given some medicine on the destroyer, I understand.

RP: Yeah. A great big navy tumbler pulled 180-proof alcohol! (Chuckles) Well, they didn't have a doctor aboard, they only had the chief pharmacist's mate.

?: Yeah. Yeah. Had you hurt yourself? Were you hurt on that?

RP: No. No. I got a little scratched up getting out of the plane from where the metal was jagged from the machine gun bullets, but...

?: What about your gunner? Was he...

RP: No, he wasn't hurt at all.

?: And you said a wheel—okay, wheels up belly landing?

RP: Yeah.

?: Probably the first and only time you ever did that.

RP: _____ in tried to hit the crest of a wave belly down, you know, with the nose up as much as I could. I didn't have that much control.

?: Was that part of training? I mean, obviously you didn't do it, but did they kind of give you some tips how to do that?

RP: Well, yeah. It's always discussed on what you, how you're going to land in the water, if you have to land in the water. And well, you can't have your wheels down or you're going to nose right over. And I don't think. I couldn't have put my wheels down _____.

?: Why?

RP: I had no, I could've cranked them down, but my hydraulics were all shot up.

?: I'll be darned. So that was your, the only incident.

RP: The only time I ever got shot down.

???: Yeah. Good for you. Good for you. Are those, during your takeoff, your daily events on the carrier were mainly, again, observation primarily, or were you...

RP: Search.

???: Search and...

RP: Patrol. We always had patrols out, always.

???: That could get pretty monotonous, couldn't it?

RP: Oh, flying over water is the most monotonous thing in the world. That's why I hated that patrolling on Pearl, out of Pearl Harbor. Fly four hours. Well, all of our patrols, even off the carriers, were four-hour hops.

???: That's pretty uncomfortable too.

RP: Oh yeah. You can't move.

???: Did you get _____?

RP: Well, it isn't, you do, but it isn't that as much as you get numb.

???: Yeah.

RP: Your butt gets numb.

???: Yeah, from sitting.

RP: You can't move. You can move your upper body, but that's all.

???: Yeah. Well, that, primarily, that was what you were doing was...

RP: Yeah.

?: ...on the _____.

RP: Except when we'd spot somebody, then you're out on combat swipes. And in those big battles, you'd be out maybe two or three times a day. Like Midway lasted for three days.

?: You were in the Battle of Midway?

RP: Yeah. And we got, I know, near everyday I was out at least two times or more often three times.

?: That's when we took the island back?

RP: No, we never lost the island. That's when they tried to take it. But they never got it.

?: Is there any incident during the World War [II] that you'd like to touch base on with us, something that you're...

RP: No, I don't think so. I can't think of anything. It's so damn long ago now, you know. I can't, I don't recall all that stuff.

(Taping stops, then resumes)

?: Just talking to Bob, we're talking about this highly acclaimed TV [television] show called *Victory at Sea* and Bob mentioned that he was, unbeknown to him, he was on one of those shows. He was a pilot about ready to take off, was that what it was?

RP: I was sitting in a cockpit, just prior to takeoff.

?: So many years later, you're sitting watching the show and you knew it was yourself, right?

RP: Oh yeah. I couldn't miss.

?: I'll be darned. That's interesting. Bob also mentioned that during the war that the crew were not allowed to have their own cameras for security purposes. Was that the...

RP: I suppose, yeah.

?: And radios because at night they'd emit...

RP: A signal.

?: Signal that could follow, navigation. Yeah, that's very good. Now, I guess I asked this before, but you never went back to Pearl Harbor after...

RP: Oh yeah. You mean, while I was still in the navy?

?: Yeah.

RP: Oh yeah.

?: Or was that your port?

RP: I went out there several times.

?: Oh right. Where was the homeport for the Big E?

RP: We didn't have homeports when it came to war. There was no such thing any more because you never knew where you were going to be. I used to spend as much time in Australia as she did in Pearl Harbor.

?: Hmm.

RP: Or in Wellington, New Zealand.

???: Yeah. Where was the *Enterprise* when the war broke out?
Was she at sea?

RP: She was due in Pearl Harbor that morning.

???: Oh really? No kidding.

RP: She had a breakdown.

???: Oh, I'll be damned.

RP: But she didn't make it in but she sent five fighter planes in that night at nine o'clock. And I remember that very vividly because I thought we were being attacked again and I had just found a mattress and I brought it in, some old, beaten up mattress. I had brought it inside of a hangar door and was trying to go to sleep when I heard all the shooting. And so I tried to get up and I must have been so scared, my knees wouldn't hold me. I couldn't stand up. And I wanted

to get out to one of the OS2s and get in the rear cockpit and get out a machine gun. So I had to crawl out there on my hands and knees. By the time I got there, somebody else was in the cockpit. But we shot all those planes down, all five of 'em. I don't know if any of the pilots bailed out and survived. I have no idea.

?: Wait, we shot our own planes down?

RP: Yeah. They, supposedly they said they came in the wrong way. Well, I don't know. I wasn't aware there was a path.

?: Oh, now this is all news. I never knew that before.

RP: Yeah.

?: Was that publicized, Bob? Isn't that interesting? So we shot our planes...

RP: Shot five fighter planes down.

?: But then, to understand what had happened that day...

RP: Well, everybody was trigger-happy.

?: Yeah, right. I'll be darned. But the Japs didn't,
_____, you said it broke down. Was it, no power at
all?

RP: Oh, no, no. They just had a breakdown. I never found out
really what the trouble was. But they couldn't, they didn't
make it anyhow.

?: Yeah.

RP: So...

??: When did it finally come into Pearl or didn't it come in?

Maybe it...

RP: I don't remember. I think it came in a couple of days later, but I'm not sure. It's so long ago, I'm a little fuzzy on that.

??: Yeah.

RP: I just don't recall when she came in.

??: Then like you say, but since the war, you've never been back to the islands?

RP: Not since the war, no.

??: Yeah. Well, I haven't been there but I'd like to. I myself would like to pay a tribute to the memorial, to the *Arizona*. I think, was it you that was telling me that there's still fuel oil coming up?

RP: That's what they say. We had just taken two million gallons aboard.

?: Two million gallons! Just before the attack?

RP: Yeah.

?: Oh. Well, Robert, this has been very, very interesting, very delightful. I know there are other things that'll come up, but it's a very historic time, part of our Americana and I'm glad you survived.

RP: Well, I am too.

?: Another little battle coming up, which you'll survive that as you did World War II.

RP: Yeah, _____.

??: Oh, just touching base, Bobby, after the war, then you—not
to get into _____, but you stayed on the West
Coast after the war?

RP: No.

??: Oh, you came back?

RP: No, I came back, yeah.

??: But weren't you, you were _____ in the newspaper and
you were editor, writer.

RP: Yeah, I went into the newspaper. I went to work for the
Minneapolis Star.

??: Oh, right after the war? Was that your first job?

RP: My first job.

?: Doing what?

RP: General news reporting. I was tempted to go back. I had, I believe, 180 days, no, 120 days to go back in the navy and they would've dropped me one rank. I dropped back to lieutenant.

?: Why? What would be the incentive even to go back?

RP: Well, I'd still be making a lot more money than I made...

?: At the newspaper?

RP: ...at the newspaper, yeah.

?: Why would they drop you back at all?

RP: Well because of the cutback in the naval personnel, period. They didn't want to keep as many experience pilots as the _____ in any specialty.

?: Yeah.

RP: They wanted to keep as many as they could.

?: What do you, if you had elected to stay, where do you supposed you would've been assigned? Back to the fleet?

RP: Oh, I have no idea.

?: No idea.

RP: I know I would've been captain, minimum, if I kept my _____ . Because two of the guys I went to flight school with came to see me one time. They were in the Korean War. This is back in the early fifties.

?: Mm-hmm.

RP: I guess the Korean War was over. And they were ferrying two jets to the East Coast and they stopped here. And they were both four-stripers. They were both captains. I've never gotten any further. You gotta go to war college to be a flag officer. But even retiring as a captain is not bad. That's same as a colonel _____.

?: Yeah? But to become a captain, you have to take advanced naval education course?

RP: You have to go to war college. No, to become an admiral.

?: And to become a captain, _____?

RP: No, admiral.

??: Well, would that apply to an army officer...

RP: Yeah.

??: ...that's a general, he has to go to...

RP: He's gotta go to war college.

??: They still call it the war college?

RP: I think now they call it something else.

??: You know, I'm going to really back up a little bit, Bob. You know, there is a classic airplane that you perhaps took your lessons in. It was called the Steerman, am I correct?

RP: _____, N2S.

??: N2S.

RP: Yeah.

?: And was that a Steerman?

RP: Yeah.

?: So it was that yellow plane, bi-wing, open cockpit.

RP: Yeah, right. Fabric covered.

?: And that was the first plane that you took your flying lessons in?

RP: Yeah, that was a basic trainer, standard basic trainer. They had another one, which was an exact duplicate, but the navy made it and they called it an N2N, no N3N. The N2 is the Steerman. The Navy was N2N. But they're identical airplanes.

?: I remember as a kid, living out in south Minneapolis during the war, I used to lay on my back and I'd look up in the sky and I'd see all these yellow planes up there doing aerobatics and...

RP: Yeah.

?: ...that was fun. In fact, I was at the Warbird show over in south St. Paul couple weeks ago and they had those little Steermans over there. Well, then after you graduated from that type of aircraft, what was the next type of plane that you flew?

RP: SNG.

?: Okay. Now is that that silver...

RP: It was North American. It was North American SNG. It had hooded, low wing monoplanes. Yeah.

?: Those you see around once in a while.

RP: Yeah, they're still _____.

?: I think they had one of those over there at the...

RP: Yeah.

?: They're not, nothing to write home about.

RP: No.

?: What was the difference between the two? Why...

RP: Well, one was a lot more power, had more _____ —trying to think of the word. Controllable prop.

?: Oh, vertical prop.

RP: Yeah. And it had, well, landing gear which was really
_____ your landing gear.

?: Hydraulic flaps.

RP: It had hydraulic flaps. It had—well, it was a much more refined aircraft. And we had it for instrument training and gunnery training. We used it for gunnery training too.

?: That could not land on a carrier, though.

RP: Oh, it could. Put a hook in it.

?: But they weren't used primarily...

RP: No.

??: Tell me a little about your first time you landed on a carrier.
Where did this happen? What type of plane were you flying?

RP: SPD.

??: It was the SPD.

RP: That first time was on the *Enterprise*, when I flew that new
SPD out.

??: Oh, you hadn't done any during your training?

RP: No, I'd never been on a carrier.

??: Didn't they teach you that in school?

RP: Oh, sure, simulated carrier landings.

??: Where was that?

RP: Pensacola.

??: What'd they have, just out in the field, you might say, a simulated deck out there?

RP: Sure.

??: With the wires and the ropes or...

RP: No, they had cables that _____.

??: Yeah.

RP: We had a lot of satellite fields around Pensacola, you know. Some of 'em even up in Georgia.

??: For what reason was that?

RP: Well, for practice landing and then we had gunnery rangers
and practice your carrier landing techniques.

?: What type of plane were you making those simulated carrier
landings?

RP: SNJs.

?: That's this one you're talking about?

RP: Yeah.

?: But you didn't have a hook or anything?

RP: No hook on 'em.

?: So you never got hooked until you landed on the Big E?

RP: Right.

?: Boy, no wonder you were...

RP: Well, no, it was my own fault. You can't land by yourself.

You have to watch the landing signal officer and he tells you

what you're doing wrong and _____ doing right, okay.

And then when he wants you to cut your engine, he just makes a stroke across his throat with his paddle. And then you drop, you just pancake in. You drop in and try to catch one of those four wires.

?: Well, when you were on the simulated landings, did you have an LSO there?

RP: Yeah.

?: So...

RP: But you're not at sea and you just really don't pay enough attention to 'em. And you can't land without 'em. I found that out.

?: Sure.

RP: And that carrier looks awfully small when you're coming in, I'll tell you.

?: You know, you're more secure, you look at these practice landings...

RP: Easier to land.

?: Different obstacles. That would be very intimidating to come in, gee whiz, Bob, coming in the first time.

RP: Oh, I couldn't believe how little that thing was, you know. I thought, oh my god, how am I gonna get down on there. But it gets commonplace.

?: Yeah. Just takes, rough idea, do you have any idea how many landings and takeoffs...

RP: Carrier landings, no. I had 'em logged. They were logged. The last I knew, it was something like 350.

?: Did you have to maintain a log?

RP: No, the yeoman took care of the logs.

?: Whatever happened to that log? Was that ever given to you?

RP: Oh, I had several of 'em. The log book was only about that thick.

?: Yeah.

RP: It's a little book and you had your own log. Each plane had a log for the engines, for the airframe. And wherever you went, your log went with you. But they were always filled out by, the yeoman would get the yellow sheets. Every time you go up, you fill out, land, you fill out a yellow sheet.

?: Oh really?

RP: Which gives the performance of the aircraft, what's your cruising speed, what's your RPMs, you know.

?: (Speaking off-mike)

RP: Your manifold pressure, your RPMs, length of flight. And then the yeoman takes that information off and puts it in your log. But all he puts in the log is, in your personal log, is how many hours you were out and who your gunner was and

it's got pilot and gunner. And that's the only information that goes in your own personal flight log.

??: (Speaking off-mike)

(Taping stops, then resumes)

??: Do you, how about how many hours do you think you accrued during the war, flying for the navy? Probably have to take a guess on that.

RP: No. Well, I can come awfully close. About 8400, as I recall, my last entry.

??: Eighty-four hundred.

RP: Eighty-four hundred miles.

?: That's a lot of miles. That's a lot of hours. Did you ever think about being a commercial pilot...

RP: I thought about it but then I figured with all the four-engine bomber pilots they had in the army, a single-engine pilot wouldn't stand a chance. And I wasn't all that interested anyhow. I think, I thought it would be a boring, damn job. So I never did pursue it.

?: Where was the last flight, where did that occur, Bob? Do you remember your last time?

RP: My last flight?

?: Yeah, where did that, the last time you ever flew an airplane was with—you didn't fly as a civilian pilot, did you?

RP: Very little.

??: You did do a little.

RP: Not very much.

??: Not really power and command by yourself?

RP: No, I had a license. I took some flights, but I had no reason to fly. And just to go up, unless it would be for aerobatics or something, you don't find _____ for that. You couldn't _____.

??: Right.

RP: But just to go up and fly, just didn't excite me.

??: Oh, right.

RP: So I just gave it up.

??: Very good.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

??: Well, Bob, I just again want to thank you very much. This has been very, very interesting and to all of those who listen to this tape in later years, this is a non-replaceable tape and I hope you enjoy it and I hope you enjoy it as much as I've enjoyed sitting here talking to Bob today. So, again Bobby, thank you. Appreciate it very much.

RP: Thank you.

??: You bet.

END OF INTERVIEW